

# News from Ed Markey

United States Congress

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**November 16, 2005**

Massachusetts Seventh District

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## **REP. MARKEY CALLS FOR MORE TIME TO SIGN UP FOR MEDICARE DRUG PLANS**

*More than 60% of Seniors Don't Understand the New Program*

Washington, DC—Representative Edward J. Markey (D-MA) urged Congress to give Medicare beneficiaries more time to navigate through the dozens of confusing Medicare drug plans so they can choose a plan that best meets their needs. Rep. Markey announced that he is a co-sponsor of the “Medicare Informed Choice Act,” to give seniors and people with disabilities an additional six months to make the best decisions and allow them to change plans once. Yesterday was the first day that seniors could enroll in the new Medicare drug program.

Rep. Markey said, “Seniors and people with disabilities are now faced with a mountain of prescription drug bills and a growing stack of glitzy brochures from private insurance companies touting their Medicare plans. Our seniors deserve a less confusing, less expensive prescription drug plan. Instead of offering seniors private insurance plans, I believe that we should have offered comprehensive prescription drug coverage through Medicare. But in the absence of an alternative federal plan, the least we can do is give them more time to understand their options and make the best possible choice. That is why I am a co-sponsor of the Medicare Informed Choice Act.”

More than 60% of seniors don't understand the new drug program, yet Republicans have refused to listen to the concerns of seniors and people with disabilities. The Administration sent incorrect information to beneficiaries, and now the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) tells seniors to use the web, even though 75% of seniors don't use the internet.

Under the Medicare prescription drug law signed into law in 2003, beneficiaries are eligible to purchase the new Medicare Part D drug benefit through a private drug plan or enroll in a Medicare managed care plan that offers a drug benefit. The enrollment period begins November 15, 2005 and ends on May 15, 2006. Beneficiaries will be charged a late enrollment penalty if they choose to enroll at a later date.

In addition to expanding the existing six-month open enrollment period to the entire year of 2006, the Medicare Informed Choice Act (H.R. 3861) will give every beneficiary the opportunity to make a one-time change in plan enrollment at any point in 2006. Additionally, the legislation will protect retirees from being dropped by their former employer's plan during the first year of the implementation of the drug plan. Without these changes, beneficiaries will face a late-enrollment penalty if they enroll in a plan after May 15, 2006, could lose employer-provided retiree health benefits if they enroll in some Part D plans, and could be prohibited from switching plans until 2007.

Democrats have been united in fighting for real alternatives to reduce drug prices and are working give seniors more time to make the best choice on their prescription drugs. Rep. Markey supported efforts to give Medicare authority to negotiate with drug companies and to allow safe reimportation from other countries. Unfortunately, the Republican leadership has blocked bipartisan efforts to lower drug prices, even though a reimportation bill passed the House by a vote of 243 to 186.

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